1: Powdermaker E-5 (1929-1930) 1933 OM10 New Ireland OM10
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CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE

562 858 THE first ritual event for the girl after she has passed her infancy is at the beginning of puberty. During the first two or three years of her life she is the pet of the community and the *raison d'être* for many rites and feasts. But during her childhood she is no longer the centre of attention, and instead lives on the edge of the adult world, listening to its conversations, imitating the dances, watching her mother scrape the taro, and later doing her share in the cooking. When her brothers and the other young boys of the village are circumcised there are elaborate rites, but they do not directly concern her. It is true, she participates in the general excitement of the occasion, witnesses the ceremonies, even helps in the preparations of food, and joins in the dances of the adult women. But she is in no way an integral part of the rites. They concern the boys. At the age of five or six, or earlier, she is betrothed, but here too, while intimately concerned, it is her mother, her mother's brother, and maternal relatives of the future husband who are the actors. She is in the background.

RITES AT FIRST MENSES

881 885 She comes to the foreground when her first menses occur. This is not just a personal matter, of concern to herself or to her immediate family, but it is a ritual and communal event. It is anticipated with eagerness, and the rites are prepared for and participated in by the whole community. Its ritual and social significance is due to the fact that the girl is now considered an adult, and that the marriage rites follow immediately. It marks her entrance into adult female

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society, as the initiation rites mark the entrance of boys into adult male society.

While the people of Lesu have no record of ages and no unit of the year, there is some knowledge from observation of the development of the body (particularly the size of the breasts) as to when the first menses may be expected. Everyone knows that some time within the next eight or ten moons a young girl will reach puberty. When I asked who of the village would probably reach puberty during my visit, I was told that most likely it would be Tsuros. And that is as it happened. Tsuros has her first menses, and the news spreads eagerly through the village. It is talked about as a great event. Immediately bananas are brought by the women of both moieties and buried in the sand by the men, in preparation for the feast which will soon be held.

There is no seclusion for the girl during this period of her first menses, at the end of which is her ritual washing. Just before sunrise she is washed in the sea by an old woman, who holds in her hand a branch of the tree *tsil*. The girl and the old woman stand in the rather shallow water just off the reef as the old woman dips the leaves in the sea and then waves them over the girl, touching the various parts of her body with the wet leaves. As she does so she says the following spell:

> Leaf, leaf, I wash her,
> Soon her breasts will develop,
> I take away sickness of blood.

Then the leaves are mixed with white lime and rubbed all over the body of the girl by the same old woman, and after that she paints the girl's hair red. The old woman is not chosen for her relationship to the girl, or because she is of any particular moiety or clan, but merely because of her knowledge of the spell. Should the ritual washing of the girl not occur, it is thought that her breasts will not develop, and she would therefore lack the symbol of womanhood.